

**From:** [Laura L. Gamari](#)  
**To:** [Clerk General](#); [Council Clerk – Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** Public Testimony Against 901 Camping Ban: No one should be priced out of their own life  
**Date:** Thursday, November 3, 2022 7:07:59 AM

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Dear Portland City Council,

I am writing to you today to add my voice to the chorus of people pleading with you to act with compassion and NOT ban the unhoused from openly existing in Portland. While it may be planned to house everyone in the future, and it's been said that there are a number of empty apartments throughout the area, it does not appear we have the infrastructure to give people a home right now. Even opening new camps, as has been suggested, would not give shelter to even half the number of people counted as currently unhoused. We've all been told time and time again that shelters are not places people want to be, and they can often be even more threatening than staying out on the street. With nowhere better to go, it is cruel and wrong to make survival illegal.

Whether or not people would be forced to go into these camps, directly or indirectly, should not be left to chance and circumstance.

It could also be even more dangerous to continue to push people into a scarcity/survival mindset with fewer and fewer options.

We need to tell the world what our priorities are - humanity and human rights should be top of the list.

It has also been acknowledged there are some people with legitimate reasons for not wanting to be housed/given an apartment, and that portion of the population would not accept one even if provided for free. Not everyone has a healing experience in the mental health system, and they have been traumatized by previous interactions with those who were supposed to help them. Subverting the status quo and the typical expectations of society should not be a crime, particularly when it is not harmful. Being considered "unsightly" is not a good enough reason to force people to uproot themselves with a simple "good luck" as to whether they can find somewhere to live. Many issues could be solved by simply giving people what they need - bathrooms, showers, laundry, trash pick up, sign ups for Social Security Disability - electric warming coats and electric cooking devices with solar powered generators, for example, to reduce the possibility of fires and help keep people warm. If we cannot simply house people immediately and provide aid to keep them housed, giving them basic necessities, smaller solutions exist if we make it our goal to provide them.

Why not ask each person what they would want, and then act?

It seems like a good idea to create alternative opportunities to make an income that accommodate people based on their personal circumstances, skills, and limitations. For example, one of the best things a job ever did for me, personally, was make it so I could clock in whenever as long as the job was done in a certain timeframe. That way, I never ran the risk of being late. I would guess most would also qualify for Social Security Disability if they had someone helping them sign up.

I want to offer two initial proposals:

1) a 24 hour art shelter. It's meant to have resources so those without a home or low-income could come in at any time of the day or night. I imagine a "library" where they could rent things like brushes or tools, with access to donated paper, canvas, wire, photography equipment - whatever they need to make things. There would be a gallery for their work only, and they'd be able to display and sell their art, with the money going straight back to them. Perhaps the public could make donations to access the gallery? Ideally, there would also be showers, laundry, private bed spaces - it's a place I would want to go if I ever found myself unhoused.

2) a "forest" within the city. I have been told the old post office space is spoken for, but I would imagine this being located on a large swath of land near the downtown services. Terraform the area and set up camp sites with electric hook ups (no fire). It's not that people would be forced to live there, but instead it could be a sanctuary for the unhoused with aversions to being inside. Again, I imagine there being basic necessities like bathrooms, kitchen, trash pick up. Instead of a fenced off parking lot with metal tool sheds, it would be a campground inside downtown - there could be tiny homes or tents, whatever people prefer.

There is no expectation that either of these ideas would solve everyone's need, but I wanted to share the vision of something I find to be more humane and helpful than dystopian. If nothing else, I will never understand how COVID didn't shift everyone's efforts toward a focus on human needs. Those who blame the unhoused for their business troubles should remember we are still in a pandemic, and many people are worse off financially than when it began. As to the terrorizing anecdotes of negative experiences that seem to stick hardest in peoples' minds: the few who may have caused any amount of chaos should never be used to represent the untold number of people just trying to stay alive without losing their sense of self.

We cannot predict the future, and who knows how life might go for each of us individually or sweepingly across the country, even the world. We could all potentially face homelessness at some point, and with no one else to turn to for help. In that circumstance, what would any of us hope for? What is the right thing to do for a person who may have spent most of their life on the streets, and you'd be taking them away from the only family, the only world, they've ever known?

I would guess that Portland City Council has received numerous emails about this, likely double or more the number of people who testified in person, so I will finish on this:

**No one should be priced out of their own life.**

Thank you for listening,  
L. Gamari